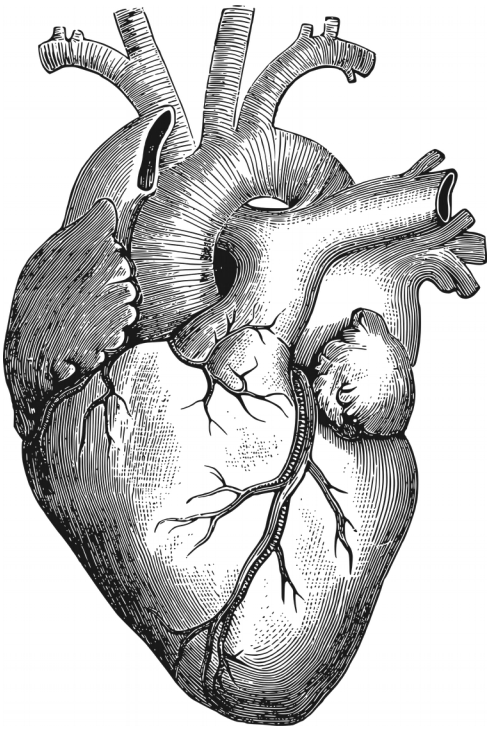
Seeking & Step-Dad

Two Queer Short Stories



Maëlys

Seeking

Chapter 1

She couldn't see anything. She twirled around in the darkness, feeling the cold air caress her skin. The metallic taste of blood lingered in her mouth.

She reached out with her hands to the grass below and sat down. She looked up to where the stars should be and let her heavy eyelids shut against the cool night air.

She woke up to a grey sky. Her jeans had new holes. The bicycle and the tree she ran into were ten feet away.

She picked up her bike, put the chain back on to the gears and wiped her greasy fingers against her jeans. She rocked the bicycle back and forth a few times before getting on and riding off.

She was in the neighbourhood where her dad had lived for a few years. Why was coming back here a good idea last night? Nostalgia?

It didn't feel like home for her when she would visit here as a kid. Only now. Maybe because this was the place that had lasted the longest.

She hit up a fast food place for water and took the long ride back home. She started to notice the dry blood on her arms and all the cuts while pedalling her way back.

Getting home she locked her bike to the fence outside and walked in. All four roommates were out or hiding. She took off her clothes and went for a shower. The scrapes burned as they were met with water.

She went for the cupboard draped in the humid towel, grabbed a can of shepherd's pie plus spoon, and made her way back to her room. She flopped on the bed and started to replay the events of the previous night while eating through the mashed potato portion of the can.

It started with the date. First friend date with a guy in years. At some point she started to get really uncomfortable being around him. Then he shared with some pride how he had falsely accused a teacher of sexual assault to get back at them. That was her cue.

She waited a bit to bail so that it wouldn’t raise suspicion. She felt her back pocket buzz while she was riding off followed by a bunch of buzzes five minutes later. When she got off her bike at the shawarma place she saw that he had sent her fifteen messages.

She celebrated the close call by ordering lots of garlic sauce in her wrap. She took a thermos out of her backpack with the virgin caesar she had mixed together. She downed it on the spot.

She got the idea to make this night her own and explore the area where her dad used to live. A lot of moments were still etched in her head, but the ones with her dad from that time were all nice.

Chapter 2

Her journal wasn't so much a diary as a collection of whatever thoughts came to mind. Fleshing out the negatives helped the rational side of her figure things out.

"I am a worthless piece of shit."

She didn't know why she felt like this.

She used to have reasons. She was abusive. She recognized that a few years ago while making her way through another workbook for survivors. She saw herself in the perpetrators described and their actions. She had done the same. She was a perpetrator. Multiple times over.

There were other things. How she had latched to both her marginalized identity and victimization to get attention because she had no self-worth. People listened to her, and that encouraged her to speak - not because she had anything to say, but merely to be listened.

Since then she had decided that she would not forgive herself for her actions but that by the same token she would no longer use them as reasons to hate herself. Yet the hate remained. She wanted to talk about it in a public way, but the radical queer community would destroy her if she admitted she was a perpetrator. Even though half of the community were abusers and they talked about accountability, they still acted like perpetrators were an exceptional kind of person that needed to be expunged. That exceptional-

ism also fueled the opposite reaction, refusing to think of her as a perpetrator and blaming the victims despite her insistence otherwise.

“I am a worthless piece of shit because I am toxic. I’ll only hurt whoever I’m with. I have nothing to offer to enrich anyone’s life. I am a fraud. I deserve to be alone.”

In the moment, this sounded like a perfectly reasonable thing to write.

Chapter 3

It had been a week since she had written that journal entry and those words didn't seem like hers as she read them, even though she knew those feelings popped up every other day.

She took her two pills and left for the gym. A patron gave her a dirty look as she entered the change room.

She ran on the treadmill. She forgot her ear buds at work so she took to the thoughts that let time flow by. Replaying bad memories, the ones that repeated in her head all the time, but this time focusing on them. Or she'd explore spanking and age play fantasies making sure she didn't get too turned on as she ran. Or coming up with strategies for each of the million things that could go wrong with the workshop she was giving tonight. She was always super anxious presenting.

Chapter 4

The workshop was going really well. This was the second time she was presenting to queer students at this college. They were into it. Some cis paramedics had also shown up to educate themselves.

She talked about how trans people were expected to want to pass and how society punished those who didn't care about looking cis. Therapists denied referrals for hormone therapy, doctors following WPATH guidelines and its ‘real life experience’ requirement denied surgery, pedestrians shouted garbage, bars refused ID, trans rights advocates implied they didn't belong in the right washrooms, etc.

The students were actively participating, talking about their experiences and how they processed things. This exchange was priceless to her.

She had found that the best workshops were the ones where the presenters understood that audience members were the experts of their own lives. Who listened. Those were the workshops where she had been able to share experiences in a room of people who understood and where she had healed. That was the environment she wanted to emulate.

Her presentation reframed existing experiences, scrutinizing what had been so normalized as to be above consideration. For some people, this might be the point where they

realized that they weren’t to blame that sinking feeling they felt when they interacted with the world. It was because the world was taking a dump on them while simultaneously insisting that there wasn't really a problem.

She shared what she knew, students shared what they knew. The paramedics were well meaning but were not cognizant of how discrimination was normalized, and so made grating remarks such as half-joking about how white straight males were now more oppressed. She chose not to lower the level of discourse to address the ignorance afforded by not being exposed to discrimination and focused her limited time on the needs of the students.

She was unsure of whether her workshop had been okay for the students until the very end when they applauded. The genuine “I liked this” applause rather than the polite “it’s custom to clap after a presentation” applause. That was a relief.

Chapter 5

She continued tweaking the slides while at work. She was in a bit of a lull. This still felt like the “new job” to her. She remembered how she had told herself she'd only be here for three years, but that was before she got in a relationship a year and some ago.

Her second screen was filled with code. She'd get back to it when she had the energy. She'd likely fudge her hours again today, exaggerate technical reasons to justify her lack of productivity.

Chapter 6

The U2 song reverberated in the church hall. She glanced over to the other pew and watched an eighty year old regular sing loudly alongside everybody. This wasn't the typical Anglican service. There was a strong contingent of students and young adults not commonly seen in churches. There were visibly queer people. There were people who had shared how they were experiencing deep poverty.

It wasn’t that the church mixed in new music with old. It wasn’t that the church made avid use of social media. The attrition of membership across religious organizations wasn’t a technology problem or one of referencing pop culture. That didn’t give enough credit to those disinterested in participating in contemporary Christianity.

Certainly, she herself had never intended to attend church again. She had grown up Catholic and became atheist in her teens. Her encounters with the Catholic church since then had been negative. They controlled half the schools and she was there when they banned student-run support groups for queer youth and their allies in schools. She had advocated for the teens. The local bishops regularly spoke out in favour of discrimination for queer and trans people and did so in local and national newspapers. Their words echoed in the street harassment and acts of aggression she and her friends had been subjected to. Her step-dad was

Anglican and told her the common Christian refrain that her marrying her previous partner would devalue marriages like those of her sister.

Years of experiencing this vitriol had made her wary of anyone who identified strongly with the Christian faith, expecting that they'd say or do something hurtful.

Then all that changed.

A genderqueer friend of hers was having a ceremony at church to mark their name change. A sort of second baptism. She went to the service. The reverend gave a touching homily about the importance of acceptance including that of transgender individuals. It was especially meaningful given that some members wore big buttons to support the Conservative party, which had just distributed fear mongering literature equating trans women to sexual predators. The reverend risked alienating them to support her friend. The parishioners were cheering, crying, for her friend. Tears of joy streamed down her face for almost the entire ceremony.

She came back the next Sunday for regular service. People had remembered her name and said hello. She learned of the church’s history. There had been another congregation here up until three years ago, but they left after they objected to the diocese accepting equality for gay people. That same congregation had kicked out the homeless outreach center that occupied the lower level.

When this new congregation started, the first thing they did was bring the outreach center back. They were openly welcoming of queer folk, blessing same-sex marriages, doing this for her friend, and walking in the pride parade. They were welcoming of parents and their young children, with services often starting with the reverend donning hand puppets and inviting the children up for a story before sending them to the daycare-like Sunday school. The people here seemed more Christ-like to her than anything else she had experienced of the Christian faith.

So she kept coming back.

She had more or less aged out of the radical queer community. This felt right. This could give her the sense of community she craved.

Chapter 7

Falling asleep was hard.

It was triggered by the dark.

She heard her screams from her childhood, in the moments of absolute fear when her step-dad was coming for her. Imagery of the worst things she had seen over the years, including someone being decapitated with a hunting knife. Or the exploding bodies of two people blown up by the canon of a helicopter gunship on infrared.

Sometimes there was no sights or sounds. It was just the jolting of her head, the discomfort, the crying, and no memory to accompany it.

Chapter 8

She sat in the comfy chair in her living room, sipping the Americano she had made. The sun shone brightly on the leaves of the various plants.

The four other roommates were still asleep. They didn't usually get up until eleven or noon.

This was her life as she knew it now. For the first time, without her running to some goal bigger than herself. She needed this pause to heal. Also she needed to get out of her sketchy basement bachelor with no locking front door and ripped up flooring for halls. This new place was a third the rent.

She was in a home with her chosen family. It was a warm and bright space, the walls decorated full of creative works done by friends, zines lining the shelves alongside binders of favourite recipes, books on trans health, and compilations 1950’s gay erotica. A homemade pillow with “homo sweet homo” was on one of the chairs that would have been well worn when they got it.

Laughter echoed in these walls. There were communal dinners and lots of venting. Some consolation and incredible amounts of love.

She turned on the television and put on a kids show.

Chapter 9

His hands were down her pants, jacking her off.

She turned her head to the side so that he wouldn't notice her eyes being shut.

She knew how she got here. The gay hookup scene and its overabundant supply of older entitled men made it easy. But she didn't know why she was here.

She wasn't even attracted to men.

He started to masturbate. He smelled like deodorant.

She hoped he wouldn't put his face against hers.

Chapter 10

She sat down and looked out of the large windows of the coffee shop.

This was known as the gay coffee shop. Half her friends had worked here at some point. She still occasionally got free coffee.

She looked back, to the drunken night where she crashed her bike, to last night with the sexual encounter.

She was acting as if she was desperate, a trapped animal clawing to get out. Out where? What was the life she expected on the other side? She didn't feel desperate. She already had everything.

She didn't know. Maybe a relationship with someone to call home? She felt really alone, and living with two wonderful couples sometimes entrenched the feeling of isolation. She knew though that people weren't the answer. Being with someone would just mean that she'd still feel the same way - and be in a relationship.

She really did have everything. She was in a meaningful relationship with one person, she thought, and she had the continuing deep bond with her former boyfriend and chosen family. She had a new community in the church. She lived in a wonderful home. Her job paid the bills. She had no debts.

She kept people watching.

Chapter 11

One of the high school girls at the table pointed to her.

“She said to go back to the client two more times to get feedback on the app.”

They were in the coffee shop area of the city's most successful tech startup. The company's own baristas worked the espresso machines. The students, about eighty of them, were stationed at tables organized by school. They were part of an initiative to get women into tech.

She wouldn't tell them how her friends who worked at this startup, a sponsor of the event, were groped and then felt like they couldn't tell anyone because their coworkers would turn against them. Or how the men at her own company, also a sponsor, passed around videos of women in bikinis that very day to the entire company along with objectifying commentary, only to have the executives encouraging the behavior. How women were rarely hired - only 9% of technical positions at her work went to them - and were almost never promoted to executive positions. But she'd be here every week, mentoring these students.

She latched onto the “she” that the girl on her team had used when referring to her.

These kids got it. Her coworkers didn't get it, the pedestrians who harassed her didn't get it, her parents didn't get it, her last therapist didn't get it. But kids got it. She didn't have to out herself or ask to use different pronouns. There was no slipping up. They just understood.

She smiled.

Chapter 12

She grabbed some shawarma fixings.

The five roommates had all pitched together to get the family sized meal. There was plenty of grilled chicken, garlic sauce, pickled turnips and pita bread to go around.

They set time aside for a family meal every month. They shared stories, vented, caught up, ate their fill, and there was always a bottle of wine contributed to the pool. For her part she was laying off the alcohol and drinking kombucha.

She zoned out and looked around her. This was what family meant to her. Just like the first night she slept here where she could hear laughter and discussions from the living room, and she just felt like she was finally home.

She didn't always feel this good about it. There were days where she felt frustrated. She was still trying to learn how to communicate that. But that occasional frustration was like with any family.

These were her kind of people and this was home. She knew that eventually they would split and make their own way. But that was for another time. She took a mental photo of the moment.

She grabbed another pita and started to make a new wrap and listened to her roommate gripe about a rude customer.

Chapter 13

She was riding her bicycle in the dark.

She was distracting herself by trying to come up with a new recipe. She really wanted to make something with deer sausage. Right now she was thinking having it in a gravy soup with roasted potatoes. She wondered if it would be too similar to a poutine and whether that was a bad thing.

She had ridden hard to blow off steam. She had already gone through the phase of muttering loudly to herself with the occasional yelling.

She got off at the park and sat on a bench. She watched people make their way through the night. She wondered when the kids came by to paint on the graffiti wall facing her.

Deep breath.

This was her life.

It didn't have the meaning she once expected of it. The dreams. But it was a good life. Maybe that would do her just fine.

Step-Dad

Chapter 1

“In the corner,” he barked.

She hurried and kneeled with her nose to the corner of her room.

“Look at this filthy mess.”

She heard him grab her clothes from the closet and throw them to the floor. She was shaking in fear and didn't dare look back.

He spoke right beside her ear.

“I'm so tired of this shit. You better not move.”

She heard him walk out and slam the door to her room. Her knees hurt but she knew better than to disobey him.

Her partner was so good at playing step-dad.

Her real step-dad wouldn’t have stepped away like this. He wasn’t the type to calm down. He’d get angry and then hit her to feel better.

He did it so often that she couldn’t remember all the times he struck her. Only those that stood out. Like when he hit her in front of her sister and realised it was a misunderstanding. He got on all fours and asked her to spank him to make up for it. She didn't want to. Or the time he made a game of it when she asked for his help finding some-

thing. If he found it first, he told her, that was a spanking. Who knows, maybe he got as much sexual pleasure from it as she did now.

Her partner barged back into her room.

“You didn't clean anything up! I told you to pick up your shit.”

She knew not to argue. She felt herself be grabbed from under her armpits.

“Come here,” he told her.

She was now facing him. He grabbed her by the hair.

“What did I say?” he asked her.

“I don't know.”

He slapped her hard across the face.

“What did I say?”

“I don't know!”

Another slap. He repeated the process. This time she was quiet. He slapped her again. She fell to the ground.

“Useless,” he said.

He lifted her up and pushed her against the wall. She saw him undo his belt.

“Face against the wall!” he yelled.

The swings struck her against her jeans. It hurt. She cocked her head slightly and could see his face. Business-like.

He was warming up.

Chapter 2

It took a few days for her thighs to turn black. Her bum didn't bruise at all anymore.

Thirteen year old her might have turned this experience into an erotic story to post online. By then her step-dad had moved on to regular threats to kick her ass. But thirteen year old her craved going over a hefty lap like his, to have her pants pulled down, to feel that pain that was unlike any other.

She still feared her step-dad then but had seen an opportunity to satisfy her desires in her dad’s new girlfriend. The girlfriend regularly threatened both spankings and the use of a horse whip.

That spanking eventually came. She was disappointed by how it didn’t hurt. It wasn’t like her step-dad.

She ran away when her dad’s girlfriend decided to use the horse whip on her a few months later. Her dad's relationship ended shortly thereafter.

Chapter 3

Her step-dad had tried to give her the boyhood that had been denied to him.

She appreciated that as an adult though as a young girl it distanced her from him. She wasn't interested in the activities he would have them do such as playing catch. Still he had done a lot for her. He helped her with homework. He taught her to ride a bike and to swim. He took her along on trips and stopped by places like a zoo or a theme park.

When he'd be sent away for his work on the RCMP to other countries he'd bring back a little something for her. He supported her interest in science, writing, and tinkering with computers.

She had never felt close to him growing up. There wasn't much in the way of hugs, fun, or laughs like with her dad. The slightest sign of perceived insubordination was grounds to hit her. She had to be at attention at all times around him which she found tiring.

Still he had raised her along with her mom, and in many ways she would become just like him.

Chapter 4

By the time she entered her first real relationship at age twenty four she had come to fear anger. To shut down when confronted with it and to hurt the other person through verbal abuse when she herself was overcome by it. None of it seemed out of the ordinary.

She had grown up where normal was her step-dad pushing her mom down the stairs. Her dad punching a hole in the wall. Her mom grabbing whatever glassware she could to throw it at the other person. Meanwhile her step-dad threatened to beat her when she expressed frustration at her parents. She resorted to self harm so that she could let the feelings out without anyone hearing her and avoid beatings.

Not once had she ever witnessed any one of them show concern about why the other person felt frustrated or hurt. Not once had she seen them de-escalate conflicts. To regard conflicts as opportunities to improve the relationship rather than as a chance to prove the other person wrong.

And now her boyfriend was pinning her down, telling her that he'd rip her nose off. This is how some relationships were she told herself. Now she was jumping out of the second story of her apartment building because she was afraid he was waiting outside her door to kill her. This is how some couples fight she told herself.

She didn't like it but she thought she could improve things on her own. That she could get the relationship she wanted by changing her boyfriend.

She was wrong.

This wasn't something she could do alone. And it was only after she got help that she realised that she was the one who needed to change all along.

Chapter 5

At thirty, her first boyfriend was now her best friend. They had both undergone therapy and both had grown into very different people from that volatile couple.

Her best friend had taught her what boundaries were and how they were important. They practised conflict resolution skills on each other.

“When you do ____, I feel ____.”

Her step-dad wasn't really in her life anymore. They had only talked twice in the last year, and only in the company of others, to exchange pleasantries.

In their last real conversation they talked about how he had called her delusional when she said she was happy as a result of her transition. She had tried to impart on him how his words had hurt her, and while that wasn't his intent, that it was important to her that he accept the outcome of his actions to her. He got defensive and told her he'd say it again.

Later she found out he had hit her niece in anger. She lost the desire to reach out.

She was now in a new relationship and was discovering new things to work on. Ways to deal with emotions she had never thought to challenge.

These days it was being able to accept her feelings as valid. The importance of allowing herself to be vulnerable and share her needs.

She had grown so much in her twenties, especially with how to handle emotions, making up for time lost to abuse and then some.

She was only going to get better from here on out.

> *"If you were spanked and say you turned out alright, consider the fact that you turned out to be the kind of person who would hit a child."*
>
> – ***Unknown***

Afterword

These short stories are the most honest works I've ever written. Part of me is terrified to share them, part of me is too tired to keep it in, and part of me is relieved that I finally wrote something that's emotionally honest.

My past works weren't like this. The protagonists I'd concoct were representations of who I desired to be rather than who I was. These characters had no emotional depth, matching my own underdeveloped emotional state.

I'm still uncomfortable with the content. My step-dad had asked me to take down a comic I had written once because it mentionned the word “step-dad.” I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to sue me if he knew I had written these short stories. I'm also afraid of my best-friend, who I never talked to about what happened when we were together.

I never said I had my shit together. I just said I was getting better.

Take care reader,

Maëlys

you are loved.